

# CHARACTER OF THE MEXICAN PROPER AND IMPROPER

On Account of His Oriental Nature the Mexican's Mind Is a Puzzle to the Foreigner—Strong Drink Their Curse

There are only two kinds of Mexicans outside the few aristocrats, the good and the bad. In other words the Indian and the despicable half castes or "gringos," according to Hamilton Hyfe in his book entitled "The Real Mexico," published by McBride, Nast and Company.

There is one key, and one only, to an understanding of the Mexican Indian, he says in the chapter devoted to that subject. That key is to realize that to understand him fully one never can. This is not a paradox. It is a plain statement of fact. To Europeans (of course) the Mexican mind is a mystery; just as much a mystery as the Chinese mind. All Asiatics are a puzzle to us. They do not reason as we do. Their minds are divided into compartments. It appears. Whether the Indians who peopled Mexico before the Spaniards came were descended from Asiatic immigrants or whether Asia was invaded in the twilight of the world by races from the American continent, no one can tell. But clearly the Mexicans are Asiatic in the sense that they and the peoples of Asia had common ancestry.

One might be forced to this conclusion by the prevalence in Mexico of the Chinese and Japanese and Burmese types of face. When I saw the Twenty-ninth Regiment, the most trusted of all, on parade in Mexico city I cried out—and a British officer who was with me felt at the same instant the same impulse of speech—"They might be Japanese." Beetle browsed, with bright eyes set in expressionless faces; stocky, short of stature, firmly set upon their feet, they proclaimed an unmistakable relationship. It is not often that one sees so many of the same type together, but in almost all parts of the country one notices frequently peons who might be Orientals. A Tehuantepec woman smoking a cigar could pass easily for "the Burmese girl a-sitting" on the road to Mandalay. Watch laborers in linen drawers trotting about their tasks with a sullen alacrity; you could fancy yourself in China or Japan.

The trusted Mexicans are generally pure Indians. They may not be able to write or read. They may keep their master's accounts by tying knots in a piece of string. They may be both lenient and incurious of all that lies beyond the range of their daily experience. But, partly because they are attached to their masters, partly because they believe that any delinquency is certain to be found out by "white magic," they prove themselves good and faithful servants. "Leave their land and their women alone, treat them decently and above all justly, keep drink away from them, don't excite them by putting into their heads ideas for which they are not ready, then the Indians are as good creatures as you will find anywhere." That is what a man told me who has lived among them and employed them for a great many years.

Drink is their curse. Pulque, mesquite, a fiery spirit distilled from a cactus root; aguardiente, the brandy that burns; tequila (tekeela), which is fermented pulque—men and women alike are eager for all these poisons. They adden themselves also with a drug called marihuana. This has strange and terrible effects. It appears to make those who swallow it do whatever is uppermost in their thoughts. At El Paso a peon came across the International Bridge firing a rifle at all and sundry. Much talk against the Americans and a dose of marihuana had decided him to invade the United States by himself. The bridgekeeper quickly put a bullet in the poor wretch.

The limitation of mental grasp is betrayed by their having very little sense of time or distance and by their inattention to anything which does not personally concern them. I asked a country boy who was guiding me the names of several birds we saw. He could not tell me one of them. At another place a dam was being built; a peon living close by knew nothing whatever about it. As in all such cases his answer was a humble "How could I know, señor?" Yet he knew a great deal about the habits of the wild fowl we were after. Like animals, he and his kind are often quick and clever over the processes which win them their food.

Like animals too they only do work enough to supply their simplest needs. They are paid very little, that is true. But they need not be pitted on a scale. Their dwellings are of "adobe" (mud brick, or of bamboo, mere huts about fifteen feet by twelve; the roof covered with wooden shingles or roughly tuck shothed; the floor of earth. Their possessions are a stove, a few pots and pans, a pestle and mortar, a rolling pin and a platter for the making of tortillas. They need little money for life in these conditions, and few of them show any desire for change. If they are paid more they work less. The only way to get more out of them is to multiply their needs, induce them to save up for gramophones and sewing machines, set the fashion among them of wearing clothes, boots, watches; persuade them to sleep in beds, sit on chairs, eat off plates and live in houses instead of "pigeon holes" in hovels. That is the process slowly applied civilization; no doubt it will be applied in course of years.

A few rub themselves in the scale of labor and to a higher standard of living.

They are often clever artisans, mechanics, masons, carpenters, electricians, and so on. Their children wear shoes and stockings, may be sent to some third rate school in the United States, grow up into the middle class. But of the mass of town Indians it may be said that their last state is worse in every

They practise fraud in the smallest as well as in the largest affairs. Honest Ministers and Government officials are exceptional.

Neither Spaniards nor Indians lack courage. They can die bravely. At Monterey I saw peon soldiers walk calmly across a fire swept square. They knew, no doubt, what bad shots the men

rebel commando. They took no precautions, sent ahead no scouts. Suddenly they were fired on at very close range from the roadside and several were killed. There were only a few rebels, but the Rurales galloped back and told how they had fought desperately against tremendous odds!

Worse than cowardly was the behavior of another troop of Rurales sent to guard a mine in the State of Jalisco. When a band of insurgents came in sight, an Englishman named Harrison, who was in charge of the property, asked them whether they would stay and fight or run. They said they would run. Mr. Harrison therefore met the

The Good Traits in the Indian Peon and the Lack of Them in the Despicable Half Breed "Greaser"

with elaborate care and sometimes with taste. Their hair is dressed to perfection. In a small town with no other evidence of wealth, this is surprising. But if you could follow them home you would find that many of them lived in conditions not far removed from squalor. The Mexican woman usually spends the earlier part of the day—the whole

tion between classes. In Mexico the relations between all sorts and conditions of men are far more human than in the United States or in England. A cabman has no hesitation in asking his fare for a cigarette if he wants one. I have seen a train "auditor," who corresponds roughly to an English "guard," sit down by an officer in a

floor, therefore, is damp everywhere, and near the walls muddy. At one end is a "braserio," not the neat, tiled affair for charcoal, with holes on top and draughts in the side, that one sees in towns, but a kind of box made of logs, raised from the ground on rough legs and filled with hard earth. A small fire of green wood smoulders in the centre of this, filling the room from time to time with blinding smoke, and around it are three or four jars of coarse brown pottery and a thin round platter of unglazed earthenware on which are baked the tortillas. Near by is a black stone with a slight concavity on its upper surface and a primitive rolling pin of the same substance resting upon it. On the floor in the corner are some framed petates, thin mats woven of palm or rushes. This is all, and this is home. At night the family huddles together for warmth with nothing but the "petates" between them and the damp ground. They sleep in their clothes and try to cover themselves with their well worn sarapes (blankets)."

That conveys, I think, an exaggerated impression of discomfort. In a cold or damp climate such a dwelling would be utter misery. The climate of Mexico is during the greater part of the year hot and dry. On the high tablelands the nights, it is true, are chilly, but I have slept in huts with only a light raincoat around me and not felt the need of any other covering. The Indians, like all other peoples in a state of nature, adapt their houses to their conditions of existence.

Yet there is one unalloyed charm about Mexican houses. That is the charm of flowers. All Mexicans love flowers. Their homes usually present to the street bare, unlovely walls, but very often you get a glimpse of a patio where the sunlight flickers on green leaves and vivid blossoms. Always you may count upon such an interior even if you cannot see it. Those peeps into gay garden courtyards are what I remember when I think of Mexican streets. It is the custom to build houses round a green plot open to the sky. Sometimes there is a loggia round this, a loggia into which all the rooms open (there being no "upstairs"), and where the household lives in warm weather, cooled by the splash and tinkle of a fountain in the centre. Or else the ground floor may be given up to offices or stabling, and, mounting a stairway, you come to a broad balcony screened from the sun by thick trails of flowering creeper. Delicious to wake up at half-past 7 of a November morning and luxuriate in hot sunshine as you go across the patio or round the balcony to your bath.

Most hotels are built more or less on this plan, which almost makes up for the hardness of their pillows. The Mexican idea of a pillow is that it should by its extreme discomfort prevent you for as long as possible from falling asleep. Otherwise hotels are tolerable. The food is usually pleasant enough. Mexican dishes are always highly seasoned, sometimes painfully "hot to the mouth." But a "mole," which is a fowl or a turkey served with a thick, dark brown, slightly sweet sauce all over it, is as good as any curry. They have attractive modes of cooking pork, for those who are hardy enough to eat it. In Mexico, there is always fruit and always drinkable coffee.

Woman servants are called "criadas" and wear their hair down, either in tails or falling loose around their shoulders. They can be trained into clever cooks, neat waitresses and careful housemaids, but it is not often that they are so trained. Much patience is needed. It is useless to expect too much of them. If they are scolded or worried, they simply leave without warning. They must be allowed to do their work more or less in their own way. Certain habits have to be checked. I suppose nearly all cooks use their fingers to test the temperature of soup. Mexican servants practise even more unpleasant tricks until they are taken in hand.

They are sometimes inclined to pilfer, more from curiosity, I believe, than from a thieving propensity. But it is a libel to call them all dishonest, as many people in Mexico do. They have odd ideas which may make them appear dishonest when they are not so. For instance, a woman who washed for an acquaintance of mine in Mexico City told him one day she was going to live in Toluca. He paid her and said goodbye. A little later he discovered that his lin a press was short of several sheets, pillow cases, &c.; he also missed some shirts. Naturally he concluded that the washerwoman had stolen them. Three months afterward she called at his office and said that she had left the missing articles at his rooms and would he please pay her? She had taken them to Toluca, washed them, and kept them until she had an opportunity of bringing them back. Time meant nothing to her. Besides, "he had so many."

## Barbers of the World

THE barber shops of the United States and Canada are the finest in the world and charge the highest prices. Comparatively few cities of Europe use American chairs and many of these run their barber shops in connection with men's furnishing stores.

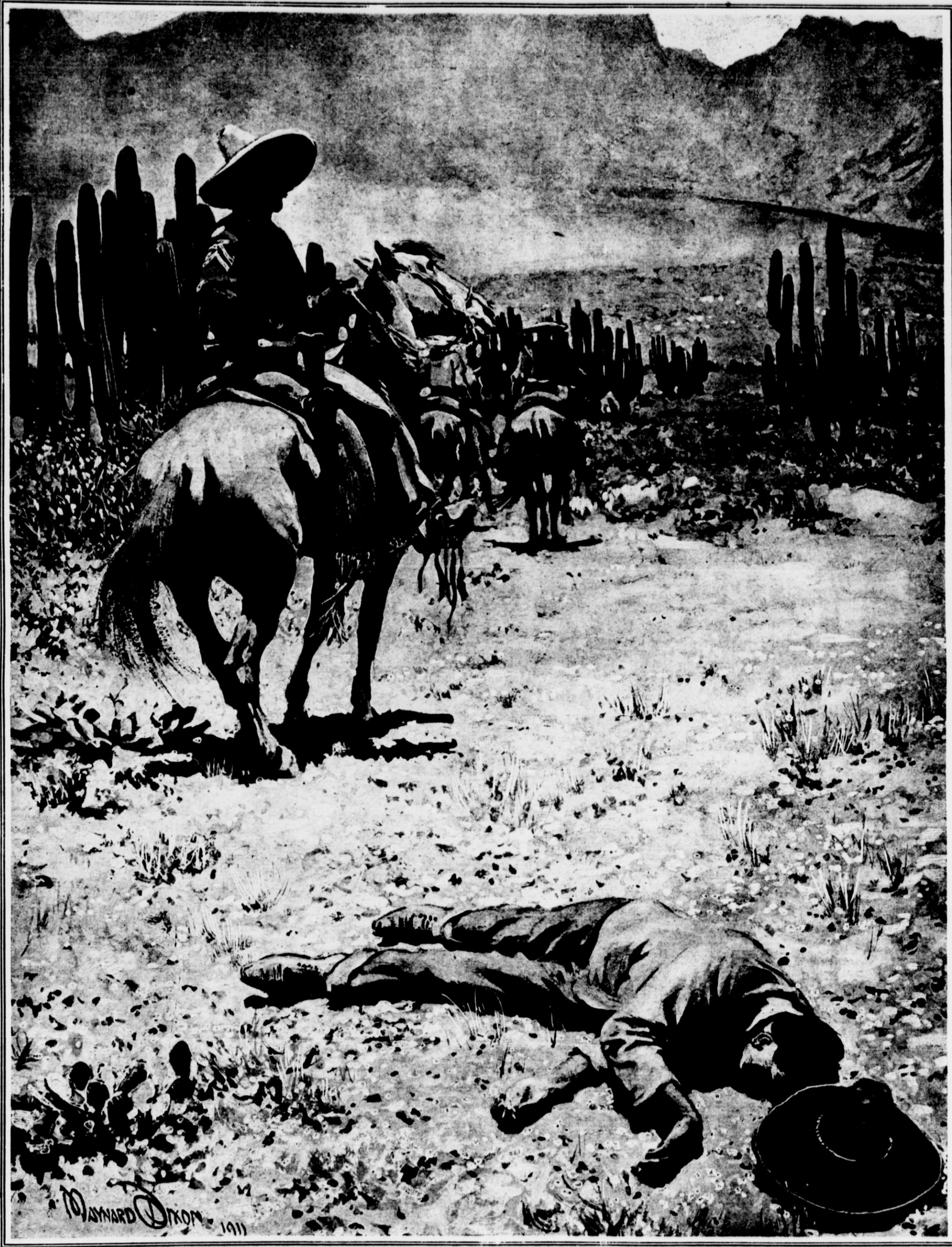
In most European cities a haircut and a shampoo costs six cents, and in parts of London a shave costs four cents. In some Italian cities one cent is charged for a shave and two cents for a haircut, and in Turkey barbers take their entire pay in tips.

Many German barbers make wigs and switches while waiting for customers and many French barbers do ladies' hair dressing. Austrian barbers are compelled to serve apprenticeships of four years, on pay beginning at 41 cents a week and ending at \$1.02 a week, before they can own their shops.

Syrian barbers seat their customers in straight backed chairs before tiny wall mirrors, and fix queer shaped pans about their throats. Then they rub on with their fingers lather made from cheap soap.

In India your barber calls at your house and shaves you every morning for \$2 a month.

In China the barbers carry stools, small tubs, razors and scissors about the streets, stopping on the sidewalks to perform their work, just as scissors grinders do in America.



La Ley Fuga, or the fugitive law, providing that any prisoner attempting to escape from a guard shall be shot, hides many a plain murder in Mexico. Any man, a common thief or bandit, not worth bringing to trial, or even a rich ranch owner in political disfavor, may be arrested by the Rurales on some pretext or none at all. They set out with him across country, supposedly to some prison, but arriving without him, give out the stereotyped report, "Shot on attempted escape."

way than that from which they were taken. It is no use supposing that Indians can be developed en masse into Europeans by being "educated." Still less can they be expected for many years to come either to understand or to make use of a constitution on European lines.

Between the mass of Indian peons in Mexico and the few aristocrats who still claim pure Spanish descent come the half castes. If at this time of day any persuasion were needed, they would persuade one that the mingling of races is a crime. They have inherited the vices of both Spaniard and Indian without any of their virtues. They have neither the Spaniard's dignity nor the Indian's simplicity. They are proud without having anything to be proud of; punctilious over trifles, but casual in matters of moment; cowardly both physical and moral, in spite of their bragadoecio; mean and crafty and "crooked" beyond belief. "A Mexican would always rather earn six cents by a trick than a dollar by honest work." That sums them up not unfairly.

on the other side were, but still, when bullets are zipping through the air it is not easy to be unconcerned. A diner d'elite demanding that revolvers should be given up; they needed them. The Mexicans who wore them could not unbuckle the cases from their hips fast enough. A short, square American railway man sat among them. "Have you a pistol, señor?" he was asked. "Yes," he said grimly, "and if you want it you'll have to take it." The rebels looked at him and left him alone.

Along with this unreadiness to risk their skins goes a bombastic exaggeration of dangers. From a place called Wadley in the State of San Luis Potosí, there rode out one day a body of Rurales (military police) to hunt out a

rebels when they arrived and was making terms with them when the Rurales opened fire from a hill above and killed four men. Never was man nearer death than the Englishman in that hour. Fortunately he was known to some of the rebels, who vouched for him, saying that he could not be involved in such treachery. His life was therefore spared. The Rurales were chased into the woods, several were killed, the rest were deprived of their rifles and ammunition and even of their clothes. Then they sent in a report saying they had defeated the rebels severely; and that report appeared in the newspapers. So is the country deceived.

The Oriental nature of the Mexican appears in his treatment of women. They are regarded as ministers to his comfort and his pleasure, and they seem contented enough. They go out very little. In the plazas on Sunday evening, and in many towns on a week night as well, they walk round and round, or sit in the lamplight, listening to the band, which, as a rule, is good, for to this extent the Mexicans are a musical people. Their toilets are made

day if she does not go out or receive visitors—in a slovenly wrapper.

In well to do families the girls are usually without any occupation. They sit about for hours unemployed, not wanting employment. Their thoughts run and their talk pivots upon men. Marriage is their one idea. After marriage they cease to trouble about their appearance. They age quickly and grow stout. How far off they remain from the habits of American and European women may be judged by their mourning customs. For at least six months, usually for a year, after her husband's death, a widow is not seen in the streets. For twelve months she wears heavy crape, then for another year lighter black, then for a further period black and white.

Many women still keep up the practice of driving in closed carriages, which in the glorious Mexican climate must be torture.

Yet one can see a bright side even to the Mexican's unwillingness to adopt the standards which civilization imposes. In more civilized countries there is a pretty clear line of separa-

railway carriage, and neither think anything of it. There is scarcely any snobbery in Mexico; that is one reason for its being such a pleasant land to travel through. The same is true of Russia; an additional argument in favor of the suggestion I have already made—that these two countries are, beneath a thin crust of modernity, in much the same stage of development—the stage through which Britain passed during the Wars of the Roses, five and a half centuries ago.

No Mexican house is untidy—I speak now of what would in England be called "gentlemen's houses." The Indians live mostly in wooden shacks or flimsy huts which they make themselves. Let me quote a description from "Viva Mexico," one of the best books ever written about this or any other country:

"A small inclosure of bamboo, fourteen feet by twelve perhaps, the steep, pointed roof covered with rough hand made shingles of a soft wood that soon rots and leaks. The bamboo, being no more than a lattice, affords but slight protection from a slanting rain and none whatever from the wind; the dirt